



**Interview with John K. Lally (1927-2002)  
Conducted by D'Anne Evans on December 15, 1986**

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**Evans:** I'm with Mr. John Lally at his home 8200 Langbrook Street Springfield, Virginia on Sunday December 15, 1986. The interviewer is D'Anne Evans. The subject is the motels Mr. Lally owned on Lee Highway south of Fairfax City.

**[recording paused]**

**Evans:** We're going to start with Mr. Lally explaining when he bought the two motels and where they are and what his purposes were and what they were like when he bought them.

**Lally:** The first motel I purchased was called the Cherokee Motel. It was located at 11325 Lee Highway, Fairfax, Virginia. It was located on the southeast corner of Shirley Gate Road and U.S. 29-211. When I bought it, it was an old motel comprising of a Big House and a total of eight cabins. Of the cabins all except the cabin nearest the Big House were in extreme disrepair. The roofs were caved in, the electricity was non-functioning, the septic field was non-functioning. The only thing that was operating was the Big House and the cabin right next to it which was known as the summer house.

The property at that time was owned by Mary Gigges Miller, G-i-g-g-e-s Miller, and Frederick A. Miller, her husband. It was the year 1960. The real estate agent was a gentleman who has long since died. He himself lived on a five-acre tract just to the east and his name was Mr. A.B. Stanley, S-t-a-n-l-e-y, and he's a well-known real estate appraiser in Fairfax County. According to the Millers, the motel was in very active operation and had been for several years.

During 1928, it was known to have an illegal still there and the property when I purchased it was very heavily enclosed with trees, very difficult to see the road.

When you would come in, you would come in a little driveway and there were trees that were on both sides of the entrance to the motel. The cabins were of wood construction and very very small but very very common in those days. There were many many old motels just exactly like that and there are very very few of them still left. I have pictures of what the cabins looked like. I will later show them to Mrs. Evans.

That particular motel we— when I say we, I'm talking about my father and I started from scratch, and we originally thought that the best thing to do with the motel was just to get rid of the cabins. So we tried to find out somebody who would get rid of the cabins and one individual said yes he would like to get one of the cabins, so we sold it to him for \$125 and he came and was able to move the cabin down to Yorkshire in Prince William County leaving a great big hole in the property.

At that we didn't realize that there was a tremendous amount of money to be gained from renting old motels, not only as a tax advantage, but also as a money maker. We got so many demands from people, Fairfax County for low-cost housing, we decided that we could rent out the cabins so we had to spend a little bit of money to fix them up. It really wasn't that much considering what they could be rented for. First individuals came in there and they were quite willing just to move into a cabin without electricity or without any plumbing. The only trouble is that the county was against that, but we could do that on a temporary basis until we were able to get the cabins functioning.

One by one while we were able to install electricity, we were able to put in a septic field, we finally brought up the city sewer to the property and eventually Washington Gas Light Company put in a gas line to the property. So when the motel stopped functioning in about 1982, all the cabins were functioning, they were all connected to all utilities and each one of them was like a little functioning utility closet. They were very very small but in them the county required us to have two basins. One for washing dishes and one for washing your hands. Also they had hot water, little hot water taps heating up the cabin. There was room for a bed, there was also a shower. We were required to have approximately six inlets for electricity. Individuals would bring in their little refrigerators and people were very very happy there. They were paying approximately \$80 a month plus electric.

From time to time we had many many unusual type of residents. One time when the Big House was full of gypsies who opened a fortune telling establishment there. In order to open a fortune telling establishment in the state of Virginia you have to pay, or you had to then, pay a \$500 fee to the state of Virginia to get permission to do this but after that it was all gravy because an individual charged five to twenty dollars for 10 [or] 15 minutes of discussion which would be about faith healing or about your fortune or whatever they wanted to call themselves. These gypsies would often times have gigantic parties in which they would take a live pig and they would roast it right out in front of all of the citizens coming up and down 29-211 causing a great amount of consternation to the individuals who would be coming by.

Also we had individuals who were transients who would come in. Many people from West Virginia and many people from Virginia coming in for construction work. A lot of other people would come in who were hiding out from the law. We had individuals who were bad people, good people, we've had many people who died right in the motel. We've had other people who were shot while they were in the motel. I myself was threatened several times, but I was always ever cautious enough to stay out of harm's way.

One individual froze to death during the winter. Another individual died in one motel room of overdose of Nytol, N-y-t-o-l. He didn't realize it's very very pleasantly flavored cold medicine which is guaranteed to put you to sleep. If you took enough of it, it would knock you out completely and as a result it knocked him out completely. His heart stopped and when we found him three days later, there was a heater that was by his bed side and his right leg was fried.

Other people have had problems with other people there. There have been cuttings there with knives, shootings, people getting involved with women tenants and all sorts of things happened over the years. We've always had problems with the Health Department at that motel because it was always substandard so we had to spend on a regular basis a great amount of money to keep it functioning. I myself received I don't know how many different citations, of course I don't know how many different times. I have never ever ever been convicted of any citation, but I always had to fix up the motel in order to avoid any conviction.

The police department always had cruisers up looking around for drunks and for individuals who were complaining about various different things at the motel. We always had problems with utilities. One time when the— there was a problem with VEPCO and all the electricity going off, all the pipes in the Big House froze, and we tried to get the money back from VEPCO for turning off the electricity, but unfortunately we were not able to so we had to put in an entirely new heating system in the house.

Originally we were on well and septic and those days are fantastic because the particular property at Shirley Gate Road and 29-211 and the surrounding area does not perk and everybody knew it didn't perk as a result well you had constant problems. Eventually the county put in a special sewer down Shirley Gate Road to help the people.

Now the second motel I purchased five years later and that was located at 11610 Lee Highway which was to the west of Shirley Gate Road about a half mile down the draw. It's at the headwaters of Difficult Run which eventually flows into the Potomac River. This particular property was located exactly adjacent directly to the east of the Smith-Carney tract which is the tract upon which the county is planning to put their new government center.

At that time when I purchased the property, however it was not the Smith-Carney tract, other people owned it who eventually sold to Smith-Carney. The piece of property was like the other property, a two-acre tract, but this particular piece called Capitol Court Motel was a pie-shaped piece which had about 300 and some feet frontage along Lee Highway, part of which had been taken out when they widened Lee Highway back about 1936, they made it four lanes. And the lower being the southern lane was there before, the northern lane was the new lane that was put in and they had to take the property from all of the property owners on the northern side of the highway for this.

When I purchased the property in 1965, along with my partner, a William R. Kearney, K-e-a-r-n-e-y, was my reserve buddy, the property was owned by Kenneth Pearson and his wife, who I understand had had it for several years and it was a functioning motel at that time. Whereas the other one was not a functioning motel.

The purchase price of Shirley Gate Motel was \$52,000 and the purchase price of Capitol Court was \$55,000. Actually, the two properties were worth about the same, but the location of Shirley Gate which was a little closer into Fairfax City and it was on the corner may have been of higher value.

The Capitol Court's motel was comprised of a very large house and a total of six cabins and one trailer. Now, the reason the trailer was allowed was because there was a trailer on the property before the trailer ordinance came into effect. And if you have a trailer on the property before the trailer ordinance comes into effect you can always have a trailer. There was some question about whether it had to be the same trailer at the time the county had admitted that it could be a different trailer although it would not allow me to increase the size of the trailer too much. I was able to increase it considerably over the years, so it eventually was a fairly large trailer there.

This particular piece of property was prior to the taking over the property by the people who sold the property to me, was an old restaurant. And this restaurant had a license to sell beer and wine, which surprised me a great deal because I didn't realize that back in those days, talking now way back in the [19]30s, I didn't realize that there were any places in Fairfax County that did sell beer and wine.

The restaurant was known as Lehmann's Tavern. L-e-h-m-a-n-n apostrophe S, Tavern, and it was named after its owners of the property, the Lehmann's. One of my very very good friends Mr. Lehman Young who owns Virginia Press in Fairfax, recalled to me that he had his first drink of beer in Fairfax County at Lehmann's Tavern back probably would've been if you added about eighteen years to when he was born in 1924, it would probably be up around 1940 when he had his first drink of beer there and Lehmann's had been there for awhile when he had his first drink of beer.

They actually had their restaurant in what we called the East Apartment, and for years while I had the motel, in the East Apartment there was a gigantic large bar that was there with a mirror. Everybody told me it would be worth a great deal of money if I wanted to sell it, but I never did sell it and after a while it was vandalized and people took pieces of it away and we were never able to save it. My understanding was that there were tables there and I don't believe they actually sat down at the bar. I think they drank beer and the bar was just there as

a service bar there. They brought the food through the kitchen through openings in the wall.

At that time there were several rooms in the Big House. It had an upstairs. It had a very very lovely living room. It had a gigantic rock fireplace, it seemed to be very old. It also had very very large beams. I don't know whether they were solid oak beams or what kind, but they were solid beams and they are still there today, and one can actually see those beams out there on the property today.

Shirley Gate has been torn down, it's been torn down for two years, but Capitol Court is still out there. It's not rented and they haven't torn it down yet. It is possible to get into the Big House through it and you can also see the cabins and the trailer there most of the doors are open. They shouldn't be open because the Health Department doesn't want them open, but they in fact are because people are slipping in and out of there.

Before the Lehmanns owned the tavern, the property was used as a residence and it is not my knowledge obviously, but word is, it passed down from owners to future owners, that the Big House was once a Civil War hospital. This can be confirmed by noting when one goes into the Big House and goes upstairs some of the new wall has been ripped away and one can see that the house is really a log cabin. The original house is a log cabin. The original house was not terribly large, it did have an upstairs. The house held a big beautiful rock fireplace. It probably had two large rooms downstairs and two smaller rooms upstairs and the additions to the house, particularly the restaurant was put on later. The cabins also were added at a later date when the restaurant was flourishing and they were used as rooms to accommodate the workers in the restaurant. Alright I'll leave it open for questions.

**Evans:** Okay, you don't think that was a motel and such? Those cabins weren't regular motel cabins?

**Lally:** I think they were— after the restaurant closed down, or maybe even during the time the restaurant was operating, some of the cabins were used as motel cabins. They were originally built, according to the owners of the property, they were originally built for the people who were working the restaurant where they could live there.

**Evans:** I see. Do you know when Capitol Courts was built? Was it built in the 1920s? Do you know or do you feel that that particular establishment was not built as a motel?

**Lally:** I think that the first thing put up was the Big House and I think that when they opened the restaurant, I think the same people the Lehmanns were the ones who had put it up. Now this could be very easily checked because all one would have to do is go to the courthouse and dig out the old assessment books and find out when they first started adding the cabins in. We would probably know that from the rise in the assessment rates. Just looking at the cabins they looked like they were built about the same time as the cabins that were built down at Shirley Gate. I would imagine that probably in the early [19]20s I would imagine the cabins were built. You might talk to Lehman Young because Lehman Young would know more about it than I do because he's been living in Fairfax County all his life. Any of the older people around who lived here I'm sure would know more about Lehmann's Tavern and answers to those questions. I'm very good on anything since 1960, but before that I didn't even know the places were there.

**Evans:** I see. Then you've only lived here since 1960?

**Lally:** No. I've lived in Northern Virginia since 1945, but I lived in Fairlington. I was one of the first residents in Fairlington.

**Evans:** Oh, I see.

**Lally:** And we lived in Alexandria there for many years. I started working in Fairfax County in 1954. I started practicing law out here.

**Evans:** I see, well you spoke of buying these with your father.

**Lally:** Yeah, I bought Shirley Gate as Joint Tenants with Common Right of Survivorship with my father A. Stephen Lally, that was Shirley Gate. Capitol Court I bought as Tennants in Common with my reserve friend William Kearney.

**Evans:** I see and do you know what the Big House on Shirley Gate, the corner of Shirley Gate Road then, you say that was an old house?

**Lally:** It was an old house. I have a feeling though that it was not as old or nearly as old as the house at Capitol. And the reason I say that is that I know the walls—

I've been in and out of that house and that Shirley Gate house was built about the same time as the motel was built.

**Evans:** Oh I see.

**Lally:** So it would've been probably not much older than 1918, 1920. This also could be checked out on the—

**Evans:** Assessment.

**Lally:** On the assessment records. Yeah, they have in the record room at the Fairfax Courthouse, they have an atlas, an 1853 atlas.

**Evans:** 1853? See I'm familiar with the [18]79. I'm not as familiar with the [18]53.

**Lally:** Is it, did I get—

**Evans:** The Hopkins Atlas?

**Lally:** Did I get the date wrong?

**Evans:** Well Hopkins Atlas is the 1879, that has every address and the names of the people.

**Lally:** Alright, well it's a small atlas. It's 1879, alright. It's a small atlas. It's the only one that they have. Alright, well if you're familiar with that I think you'd probably find the Capitol Court house showing on that. Right next to Difficult Run. You want to look at where Difficult Run crosses 29-211 and then look just at that point and see if there's a house there. I think you'll find it there. That will kind of confirm that that house was there at least then and probably that it was there during the Civil War.

**Evans:** Right, we need to— that would be very interesting to substantiate that because if what we can document what you're saying we in fact should, it should be on the Historic American Buildings Survey here in Fairfax County, so I'll ask about it.

**Lally:** Well it's not going to be there much longer, they're going to tear it down.

**Evans:** Well that's what I was thinking, we need to look at it and just get a record of it. In other words, it's not so much a case of preservation as recording what has



been. And do you... then this was an old farmhouse on the corner of Shirley Gate Road, is that right?

**Lally:** No, I wouldn't say it was a farmhouse.

**Evans:** It wasn't a farmhouse.

**Lally:** What happened was, in those days there was already a couple of motels down the highway. As a matter of fact there were a lot more than a couple of hotels. When I first came to Fairfax there were a whole lot of old motels just like this one. Several of them have been torn down in the last maybe ten or fifteen years. There was one Lord Fairfax Motel, a good-sized motel, just off the, very close to Kamp Washington there on the south side of Lee Highway close to Arlington Boulevard and Route 50 in Fairfax City. And then there was another old motel that was right across from Bob's House of Beef near Fairfax Circle. I've seen those torn down. As a matter of fact one of the cabins from the one that was torn down there at Fairfax Circle we had Bill Patram bring all the way down and it became our Cabin 5, we replaced the Cabin 5 we sold at Shirley Gate.

**Evans:** Who bought the cabin and took it to Yorkshire because I'd like to take a picture of that and see what he did with it?

**Lally:** He stuck it onto his house, added it onto his house. I'm sure it is still there but I would have a devil of a time finding it for you.

**Evans:** You know what his name is?

**Lally:** No I don't and it would be very very difficult for me to even find that for you.

**Evans:** Well that's alright, I just thought that was something that was interesting. You happened to know for instance there are many possibilities as to how these cabins were built, whether they were just thrown up by local carpenters. They could have bought Sears cabins. Sears along with their houses marketed little cabins just about the size of these motel cabins. You know whether any of these motel cabins would've come from Sears just off hand?

**Lally:** I don't think so. I think they were all constructed. The construction is a little bit different for some of them at the Capitol and Shirley Gate. The cabins that were on the west side were, they used regular siding and the siding was about

maybe five and a half inches wide with regular wooden siding. The cabins on the east side they used a kind of asbestos shingle and I think this had to do— These sidings were all original sidings, I think they indicate that they were put up at a different period of time. It's my understanding that the type of siding that was used was called German siding and you can find a lot of old houses down on Eastern Shore that had this kind of German siding. As a matter of fact, you can't get German siding around here very easily but if you go down to Eastern Shore you can get a lot of that stuff. You can get those asbestos shingles and everything down there.

**Evans:** Now when you say German siding, is this the regular siding or is that the asbestos shingle?

**Lally:** Well, particularly asbestos shingle was a different kind of stuff. I think the German siding was called German siding, it's a certain type of siding. I could be wrong on that but I know that years ago we had to replace some of it because I had to go out down to Eastern Shore to get that.

**Evans:** Now from what you're saying Mr. Lally, the primary use for the motels when you bought them beginning with Shirley Gate in the [19]60s, those motels were primarily for low income housing or were they motels in the sense that the people coming to Washington stopped in them particularly anymore or do you think that had changed?

**Lally:** Back when the Cherokee Motel was going good and also the Capitol Court Motel was going good, these were primary stops and regular motels we just didn't have any big motels.

**Evans:** You didn't?

**Lally:** You have to remember that all the regular motels were built at this exact time. For example, the first decent motel, big motel, we had in Fairfax City was the White House Motel and it wasn't until a few years later that we had the Breezeway and some of the other motels came in, but it was a good long time before we had any real motel like the Holiday Inn and that was first owned by Neville Roy McKay there on Chain Bridge Road. And so these were regular motel stops and these were people coming up from other parts of the state and they would come in there and be very effectively taken care of. They would have

people in there who would change the linen, who would do all that. All that was done. They were regular motels. Later on when more of the new motels came in, well then the old motels eventually became rented out by the week and the month. And well while I had them they were always rented out by the month.

**Evans:** I see, but when they were built they were regular motels?

**Lally:** Yeah, they were regular motels.

**Evans:** Yes, in the [19]30s and [19]40s.

**Lally:** Right, and often times meals were served.

**Evans:** Yes.

**Lally:** They were actually served meals.

**Evans:** In the restaurant?

**Lally:** Yeah.

**Evans:** Yeah.

**Lally:** You could come in and you know just buy drinks themselves. Whether there was ever any restaurant in Shirley Gate, I don't know. There could have been, but I don't have any record on that. There was a carry-out at Shirley Gate while I was there. They used to have trucks coming in and they actually prepared the food there and put it in the truck. They had about six or seven of these carry out trucks that went around the construction sites with the food to be there. But I don't think that they had anything there for this reason, that there was a very large motel right across Shirley Gate Road on the west side of Shirley Gate Road.

**Evans:** Oh.

**Lally:** And that was torn down some years ago and that was a very nice motel. It was owned by Mr. D'Angelo when I first came there. It was very very modern, much newer than my motel, much newer than Shirley Gate or at Capitol Court. But there was a very lovely restaurant that was right there and that restaurant still stands. It's not a restaurant anymore.

**Evans:** What is it? What building is it now?

**Lally:** It's not being used for anything. Ted Britt bought that corner and he generally parks trucks there. He parks cars there. Uses it as overflow. But the actual restaurant building is still standing there. It's a brick building and it has big window crosses. They're located on the southwest corner of Shirley Gate Road and 29-211.

**Evans:** Oh okay. And Ted Britt owns that?

**Lally:** Yeah that whole lot. That lot is a little, I think it's a little smaller than Shirley Gate. It's almost two acres. It's right next to the greenery on the left you know where they sell plants.

**Evans:** Yes, I know. I guess I thought that corner was your motel. Cause there's a little building that could've been a motel office.

**Lally:** No. My motel was the building on the southeast corner of Shirley Gate Road. There's the only thing that's left of it and you can tell is a phone booth. There's a phone booth still on the motel property. There's also one very large piece of wood that— [mumbling quietly] but yeah I think that's gone now too so the only thing that would be there is just a phone booth that's the only thing that's left. Everything else is down there. There's a sign up there saying that there's a storage place that's going to be built there on the corner.

**Evans:** Yes, that's right.

**Lally:** Yeah, that's the property I owned.

**Evans:** That's the one you owned?

**Lally:** Yeah. The one on the other side is D'Angelo. He came in later. The cabins were all brick. For some reason or another whoever purchased the property didn't have any foresight to go ahead and rent those cabins out. They could've made a lot of money renting those out, but they were in very good shape. But they didn't know what I knew.

**Evans:** About how to rent them.

**Lally:** Yeah. I thought about buying that myself because you know I always had an overflow. And incidentally a lot motels down in Fairfax wanted to work out deals with me to handle their overflow because they at that time when a lot of the new

motels had not been built they had overflow and they wanted to and would've liked to have an additional place where they could send people.

**Evans:** Yeah. Alright, but this— What was, well I can ask you later what Mr. D'Angelo's name was. Is he still available do you think?

**Lally:** No, he'd be dead long ago. I'm sure I think I heard he died several years ago.

**Evans:** Oh, I see.

**Lally:** We're talking about he probably died around 1968 something like that. I think he closed the motel around [19]60.

**[Recording paused]**

**Lally:** We had individuals we called managers who would only do... rent the places out, pick up the money from some of the tenants and then we did have a fellow who operated our trash service there. He had a pickup truck and they would all put their trash in the pickup truck, in the back of the pickup truck, just dump it in there and then once or twice a week he would take the stuff out to the dump. His name was Bruce and he did it for several years.

Most of the time I did all of the managing. I would go and pick up the rent from both motels. My father did a lot the upkeep. He was not only an electrician but he knew about plumbing. He knew about carpentry and was very good, so he was able to do all that. When he left for California about ten years ago, why then I had to do all that. I had to do all the... and I got to be pretty good at carpentry and electricity, although I never did master plumbing and [inaudible] and stuff. But I had to do everything there for the last several years. My partner Kearney lived over in Maryland and he never would come over and so... it wasn't that difficult.

The biggest difficulty was the county always coming up with these large gate(?) sheets with what had to be done, all the improvements and it kept me busy just about every weekend out there painting and putting new roofs on. I did it myself I put new roofs on several cabins and painting the cabins, painting the inside, outside. Constantly putting new screens in. People were very very difficult because they were rough people. They would bang open the doors and of course then the county would make us go ahead and fix it up.

**Evans:** Were many people— the owners of the motels at that time in the 1960s, now we're taking the [19]60s primarily I guess when you first bought it, were they people like you who bought them for investments or were many of the families who started those motels still there?

**Lally:** As far as the people who... I was the first one I think who ever bought any of those like this. When I came in the people who had bought them were getting older. These people were all about my age anyhow, they were in their fifties and they were kind of looking toward retirement and they kind of wanted to get rid of it. I was not looking initially to run motels. I was looking initially to buy this land as an investment because both locations I thought were very good. And in order to keep being able to pay off the various trusts and notes I had on the properties, it was good to keep the properties functioning because Capitol Court could almost pay for itself and Shirley Gate could have paid for itself also but we paid it off very quickly whereas Capitol Court took longer.

But the original owners, a lot of them are still around. But you have to realize that the other ones most of them were built later. The ones that were as old as ours, there was only— I don't even think Lord Fairfax there at Kamp Washington was as old as our motels. And there were motels that were older than ours that have been torn down. There was going down the highway you can still see signs of a place where there was a motel there between Capitol Court and the All States Motel which is still functioning. All States is much newer than ours.

**Evans:** Yes.

**Lally:** But there was an old one that was in between the two and that was torn down.

**Evans:** That's where Glen Alden is.

**Lally:** Yeah. Glen Alden. Glen Alden Motel.

**Evans:** Yep.

**Lally:** Yeah.

**Evans:** And the Choice Bookstore was their office, I think Mr. Lebowitz told me, which is across the highway from the actual cabins.

**Lally:** Yeah.

**Evans:** That must've been awkward.

**Lally:** Yeah. Well now the All States— is this the one that you're talking about, the Glen Alden, is that torn down?

**Evans:** Next to it. Glen Alden is torn down. He said—

**Lally:** Okay yeah because he'd probably seen that over there. I've seen that Glen Alden torn down. It was torn down when I first bought in [19]65 when I first come down.

**Evans:** Oh it was torn down before you even bought yours.

**Lally:** Oh yeah, I never saw it. I just saw the signs of Glen Alden. I just saw a sign there and said oh there must've been an old motel there between Capitol Court and All State.

**Evans:** Mhmm. Well let me ask you, what were you planning to do with Capitol Court when you bought it? I was wondering because I've talked to, I have a friend who lives in Lee-Hi Village and was there about that time, about 1968 thereabouts or [19]69, and another friend I just happened to mention this to in Dixie Hill and they were concerned that an office building was going to be built there. When you first bought that was that what you had in mind when you bought it was to sell it for an office building? Somebody wanted to buy it?

**Lally:** No, no, no. Shirley Gate I always thought that was a corner location, I always thought that would make a good shopping center site. When we purchased it there was a grocery store that was right next door and that was there for many many years. It was called Shirley Gate Market. Since that time 7-Eleven was always bothering because they wanted that corner so bad and I never would sell it to them because all they wanted was a little area, they wanted the best piece and they were willing to pay, they were really going to pay an arm and a leg for it. And a service station wanted it too, but I never worked it because I wanted to sell the whole thing. There really should be a shopping center on all of those pieces, those three pieces there, the Dennis tract. But the people can't get together, everybody wanted too much. [Inaudible]. It may still be a shopping center.

When I bought the Capitol Court, I was already in the motel business and so I knew what I was doing. So I saw that and it was an operating motel and when we purchased the property I said to Bill, I said Bill that's an operating motel, they don't really want that much more, I said I believe we can actually buy that motel and pay for it out of the proceeds from the rental cabins and we did. The idea of that was that eventually the whole area would pick up and we would go ahead and rezone that.

I had Shirley Gate rezoned. Shirley Gate was of non-conforming use which meant that you could use it as a motel but you could not use it for anything beyond that and I went ahead and had it rezoned to commercial general which meant that you could put stores on it.

Now Capitol Court we never did have it rezoned. It's still a non-conforming use motel, but that doesn't mean you can brick it up and make a beautiful motel out of it. I mean all that you can do is just run it as the way it's being run now. If you got a non-conforming use motel you can't put a nice motel on it. You can fix it up. You can keep it going like it is but you can't improve it. And when I say you can repair it but you can't— there's kind of a fine line between improve and repair but you can't put a new motel. Because the people who are buying it, who bought it from me, they're going to put a motel up there.

**Evans:** Oh they are?

**Lally:** Yeah. Sure as a matter of fact if you look, they bought that and the woodyard right next door and they've already— if you go by there, you'll see they've already had Hazel put the sewer in. They've already connected sewer. And so those two parcels are being put together to make four acres and their intention is to put a motel on it and it will be one of these budget motels.

**Evans:** Oh yeah. Is that what the hearing is about? I went to the hearing last summer which was listed on the board, just to find out what was going to happen and it was put off.

**Lally:** It was Neville Roy McKay. Neville Roy McKay. He's the guy who owned Holiday Inn in Fairfax.

**Evans:** Oh yes.



**Lally:** He's the guy doing that. Ralph is an attorney.

**Evans:** Yes, alright. I know he's listed. So that's what the plan is is to have a motel there and that would be next to the new county building then if they build it there. Or near it?

**Lally:** No. Well that's not the way the plans go. But it would be the closest location to the Smith-Carne tract. Now with the way plans are drawn is the people who are buying Smith-Carne tract, The Smith Company, are going to be able to develop all the area around the new complex but the area that is next to Capitol Court is not going to be in the complex. The complex is going to be way back in. There's going to be office buildings, houses, everything, apartments all sorts of stuff. Probably it's going to be RPC, I don't know. I don't think it's all going to be office buildings, I think they're going to have a little bit of commercial, they're going to have a little bit of apartments is the way they planned it. So, Capitol Court is next to the Smith-Carne tract, but it's not going to be next to where they are building the complex. Turn that off and I'll show you.

**[Recording paused]**

**Evans:** We're looking at the Fairfax County proposed plan for New County Government Complex.

**Lally:** October 1986.

**Evans:** Dated October 1986.

**Lally:** On that you'll notice that Land Bay D is right next to my property, my property is a bit east of that.

**Evans:** Oh. It's right there.

**Lally:** And that's going to be 58 acres of office and residential mixed. Alright now the government center is going to be right up here. The 100-acre government center is going to be back in here and it will be called Land Bay C. And then your Land Bay B is going to be over here, it's going to have 25 acres of office residential mixed between the interstate I-66 and the government center, probably have some kind of way of getting out onto 66 there. But you see my property is not next to the government center plan.

**Evans:** I see, but it's next to the entrance to it where there's going to be a lot of the complex that goes around it.

**Lally:** That's right. It will be as close to the center as any independent outsider will be. Now just to the east of my property there is a light industrial farm of which they're going to be putting up all sorts of buildings there. Just east of Capitol Court.

**Evans:** East of Capitol Court.

**Lally:** Yeah, yeah.

**Evans:** Then what Mr. McKay is planning to bring up, I believe it's postponed to January where they wanted to—

**Lally:** Yeah, he's interested in putting up a motel—

**Evans:** A motel.

**Lally:** And I think that's going to be ideal because I don't think he's going to have any competition there because he's going to have everything to the east is going to be light industrial and there's no rezoning to the south except for just a couple of places. There is a place right across the southeast corner of... that uh... there's a road going back in there, you mentioned it real quick. The subdivision across from Capitol Court.

**Evans:** Across from Capitol Court. Glen Alden? No. Oh, Dixie Hill?

**Lally:** No.

**Evans:** No.

**Lally:** The other one.

**Evans:** Lee-Hi?

**Lally:** Lee-Hi Village.

**Evans:** Yeah.

**Lally:** The southeast corner of Lee-Hi Village Drive, there's nothing on it yet—

**Evans:** That's right.

**Lally:** But that's about a four-acre tract. That could be something, I don't know quite what they can put up, but this motel will basically conserve this particular area there. It's a very good location.

**Evans:** Now let me ask you, I'm interested because when I went through the Board of Supervisors packages or started to back in about 1940 when probably a little ahead of when Capitol Court was built, they had a new zoning ordinance. They began to think about what they wanted under these areas and they had certain restrictions on what you could do. When you speak of non-conforming use, what was that area at Capitol Court rezoned for, supposed to be? In other words you say—

**Lally:** Well it had nothing to do with the zoning it was just, it had to do with the actual use of the property. Now Capitol Court would have been in one-acre zoning. Shirley Gate would've been in one-acre zoning at that time. But they both had old motels on it. And so when the zoning ordinance came in everything that was there already in use was legal. The motel use was legal. You could repair it, keep it going like it was, but you could not alter it or expand it or improve it so that's what happened. Now the grandfather clause, when you hear people talking about the grandfather clause they're talking about something that was there before the zoning ordinance and you can continue it. Just like there was one trailer that was there between that.

**[Recording paused]**

**Evans:** Norman Higginbotham, now who was he?

**Lally:** Alright well Norman Higginbotham, H-i-g-g-i-n-b-o-t-h-a-m. Norman Higginbotham, he owned eleven acres at the northwest corner of Lee Highway and Jermantown Road and that property is just down the road from Shirley Gate Motel, not terribly far, but just to the east. He also owned the Fairfax Theatre which is now being made into Toyota and K-Mart is on Higginbotham land. And then also he owned all the first apartments in Fairfax. I'm talking about the first garden type apartments in Fairfax.

**Evans:** Where were those?

**Lally:** They're still going.

**Evans:** Yeah.

**Lally:** They're right next to the— close to the Fairfax Nursing Home on 236 on Main Street.

**Evans:** Yeah.

**Lally:** You know on the south side. I still say the old Higginbotham house, it's a rock house right there on the... they put a feeder road back in there to the school board and it's on the southwest corner of the feeder road, that little house you can see the little apartments back there. There's about oh maybe four sets of garden type apartments back in there. I think they're used for old people now, elderly people. Well Norman lived in that house and he owned all of that area. He is now living out on Fox Mill Road in a big beautiful old house that had some kind of historical beauty.

Norman can be reached through his son Grant, he's a buddy of mine. He's a lawyer. His son is Grant Higginbotham. Grant he goes back about maybe fifty years. Grant goes back fifty years, but Norman will go back another twenty or thirty. You're going to get back eighty years. That's going to maybe fill in a little stuff that I told you. Lehman Young also. Lehman Young is good cause he's been here, he was born here, been here for 63 years. Now Lehman Young is simple to find he's at the Virginia Crest. The Virginia Crest is a functioning printing establishment right in Fairfax City. It's called The Virginia Crest, it's in the phone directory and his name is Lehman Young. L-e-h-m-a-n Young and he may be related to the Lehmans, he may not be.

**Evans:** Oh, I was just wondering.

**Lally:** But Grant Higginbotham's phone number is 273-5544. Well anyways he's in the phone directory.

**Evans:** Yeah, I'll look it up.

**Lally:** Grant Higginbotham, attorney, 273-5544 or 4455.

**Evans:** Alright. Now was this on the corner of Jermantown Road did that —

**Lally:** And Maple Cobb. Maple Cobb too. You know who Maple Cobb is?

**Evans:** Mavis Cobb?

**Lally:** Mavis Cobb.

**Evans:** Mavis Cobb, who's a lawyer.

**Lally:** Yeah. She was a [inaudible] back in 1916 so she'll go all the way back to the turn of the century. She must be, she won't tell you what her age is but she's got to be close to ninety now.

**Evans:** She's a delightful lady. I met her at the Oakton High reunion because I wrote about that.

**Lally:** She'll know a lot of stuff around there but Mavis Cobb won't know anything about drinking beer.

**Evans:** No, she wouldn't have.

**Lally:** You know I don't think she ever has married.

**Evans:** Let me ask you too now. When you speak of this motel on Jermantown Road that Mr. Higginbotham owned, is that right, was that—

**Lally:** No, no, no, no.

**Evans:** No.

**Lally:** No. He owned eleven acres there.

**Evans:** He owned eleven acres but there wasn't a motel there necessarily?

**Lally:** Oh no, they had all sorts of different kinds of junkyards there. It was terrible.

**Evans:** Oh?

**Lally:** It was the worst looking property you ever saw in your life. They took advantage of the fact that the zoning was light industrial and they had Bel Air Auto Parts and they had a junkyard behind Bel Air Auto Parts and then they had several other plumbing places there. It was just a terrible junkyard piece of property. Everybody was so glad when they got rid of that. It completely turned the whole area around.

**Evans:** Well was there a motel sort of where Kamp Washington Shopping Center—where the Giant is?

**Lally:** Yeah, no it was the southeast corner. That was the Lord Fairfax Motel that was on the southeast corner. That was over there, there was a motel there and that was where well there was a bondsman by the name of Brown had his offices in that motel. They tore that down five years ago, not too long. That was called Lord Fairfax Motel and that was on the south side of Lee Highway right past that donut place. I think they tore it down to put in that new dealership there, that new automobile dealership.

**Evans:** Steve Smith Pontiac, would that be it?

**Lally:** Maybe Pontiac, but it's right, you can't miss it because— you know Kamp Washington?

**Evans:** Mhmm.

**Lally:** Come east on Arlington Boulevard maybe oh maybe 100 yards, well that was where the property started there. And it's where that new dealership is. You can't miss it. It's right across from Frank's Hardware. Frank's Hardware used to be the old Safeway. I mean right next to the Safeway, I think that was a Food Fair I think. Safeway and Food Fair.

**Evans:** Mhmm yeah. I talked to Mr. Bowman whose family also came from Oakton and I had to ask him where his Aunt Bertha went and he was saying he was very interested because he said his family used to deliver milk to these motels in the [19]30s and he remembered a restaurant called The Black Lantern. Do you remember that? Was that there when you first came out here to Fairfax or was that gone?

**Lally:** The Black Lantern?

**Evans:** The Black Lantern Restaurant right about where that shopping center with the Giant and all that complex is.

**Lally:** Yeah.

**Evans:** It was a little hilltop sort of affair.

**Lally:** Yeah, The Black Lantern Restaurant. Do you have something I can write one?

**Evans:** Yes.

**[Recording paused]**

**Lally:** Alright where I think The Black Lantern Restaurant was, was right here.

**Evans:** Oh, where Best is in other words. In that area.

**Lally:** Yeah Best was torn down. And that was there a long time ago that Black Lantern. I think you're talking about 19— way back, The Black Lantern. I think that's where it was. Now here's where the Lord Fairfax Motel was.

**Evans:** I see that is about where Steve Smith Pontiac is today I think.

**Lally:** I guess. Now this thing here, I think there were cabins that were back in there.

**Evans:** Oh, that also was a motel on that corner.

**Lally:** I think there may have been cabins there, but I think there was The Black Lantern. Now this thing up here, you're going back awful far when I start remembering back what was at that particular corner because that was one of the first things that happened. There was a Safeway store right here. The Safeway store is still there at least the building is still there.

**Evans:** This is 1964?

**Lally:** And I think this one where Frank's is that was also a grocery store or Foodtown or Food Fair. Two stores right there next to each other. Safeway put them out of businesses. But there wasn't many things here. This was there and this was there. Right here was a Cities Service station. Very bad location. Now they sell records out of that old building. And over here this corner over here, this has been there so long that you're going to have to get a real old guy to get me to back this. When they put the shopping center up there, the Giant shopping center, it was just about the time that I came to Fairfax. Way long ago 1954 or something like that with the Giant in there. This little tier of stores right here was put in later on. And then of course up here there was a park— I think it's still there, there was a— I think it's called Hilltop trailer park.

**Evans:** Yeah. Waples Mill. Waples. It's the Waples family from Waples Mill.

**Lally:** Yeah further down. Further down the Waples Motel was further down but this was a separate motel. Yeah, Hilltop was not the same one.

**Evans:** The mobile home park?

**Lally:** Yeah, the mobile homes are still there I believe, it's a different motel. I mean they're different trailer parks.

**Evans:** Oh it is?

**Lally:** The Waple trailer park is further down.

**Evans:** Oh okay, I see what you mean.

**Lally:** And this little lane of stores up here was always there, that was here for a long time, they're quite old. But that Black Lantern I think was right here. I think that was where it was. It hadn't been there for years and years and years. I think maybe— you know the building was torn down. I think the building was there for a while and then it was torn down. Best bought it all out they tore the whole thing down. But The Black Lantern I believe was there and it was converted into a few little stores, different type of stores there.

**Evans:** Yes because we used to take our T.V. to a lady who ran the T.V. repair shop on that corner.

**Lally:** Yeah, yeah. Now don't quote me on it, but I think that's where The Black Lantern was.

**Evans:** Mhmm. Well I was wondering you see in looking over the history of motels in general, it becomes very interesting because they really only date from the [19]20s and [19]30s when the highways began to be built by government money and when people really traveled.

**Lally:** This was built in 1936, I understand.

**Evans:** Yes, that's right. It's a brand new road cut right through the farms.

**Lally:** Yeah, the Arlington Boulevard was new.

**Evans:** Yes.

**Lally:** Now this extra lane here. I think I came to a date on that extra lane when this was made—

**Evans:** Oh yes, you bought—



**Lally:** But that was before— the old deed had a list of set photographs(?) I don't see that down here.

**Evans:** Oh you said 1928. No, that was when they had an illegal still.

**Lally:** Yeah, no, but anyway, this added lane was put in here back around I don't know where, but it was before I bought the property for sure. I think it probably— but I know this was 1936. We use to examine files about 1936.

**Evans:** That's right. It was put through.

**Lally:** But the history of Fairfax goes back so far. I mean we had mass transit out here, you know?

**Evans:** Oh yeah.

**Lally:** We were connected to Washington, D.C. with mass transit back then. I mean by the time I came to this, it's been such a little insignificant part of the history of Fairfax, except that when I first came to Fairfax as far as restaurants were concerned there were no restaurants of any importance in Fairfax. In 1954, the only places you could ever go to lunch was Bob's Beef House, it was just a streamliner then. You know just a streamliner restaurant?

**Evans:** Mhmm.

**Lally:** You could go the Fairfax Country Club and you could get a hot dog. You could go to the old, there was an old— at the corner of Fairfax Circle there was a Howard Johnson's, a little Howard Johnson's.

**Evans:** Oh yes. I remember the Howard Johnson's.

**Lally:** Probably the Howard Johnson's was the best one but there just wasn't anything else. Up at around the courthouse they eventually put a duck pin bowling alley there and you could buy sandwiches there but there was just nothing to eat, no place to eat anywhere around there.

**Evans:** This is 1954?

**Lally:** Yeah. So when you're talking about The Black Lantern, why you know that's why I remember there was a lousy little place called The Black Lantern and it wasn't worth anything at all. And of course there were a couple of other little streamliners, they looked like little—

**Evans:** Streetcars that are turned into—

**Lally:** Yeah yeah.

**Evans:** Trolley cars turned into eating places.

**Lally:** Yeah yeah. There was a few of them along there. But there weren't any places, I mean there wasn't anything to eat.

**Evans:** Well this is why people— I wonder why people stopped so far out. Fairfax seems like a long way outside Washington to me. And yet my one friend of mine one who stopped here when she came through on her honeymoon said they stopped because they thought that this was close to the capital and you found that was true?

**Lally:** Yeah.

**Evans:** Along Lee Highway?

**Lally:** Mhmm. Well I said when people came here to Fairfax that they— this was the first, the only built up place between Fairfax and Falls Church because you will recall in those days why Seven Corners was just a mass of lights. When I say mass of lights I mean it was open fields, completely open fields, you'd see a couple of traffic lights were over there, you know but there was nothing there.

**Evans:** That's right.

**Lally:** And there was nothing, none of that, there was nothing between Fairfax and Falls Church.

**Evans:** No, that's right.

**Lally:** And so If anybody wanted to stop and you were near the Capitol, why that would be it.

**Evans:** Would be to be out in Fairfax.

**Lally:** You're not going to find anything from Fairfax Circle until you get to Falls Church, there were no motels.

**Evans:** No, that's right, that's right.

**Lally:** And Falls Church didn't have much.

**Evans:** Falls Church didn't have many motels?

**Lally:** No, they didn't have much as far as motels were concerned. And my recollection was Annandale had nothing.

**Evans:** Right. Well then what about Arlington? Did people do a lot in Arlington or was that part of the idea that you stopped outside a city to avoid the traffic. This was one of things that the [19]30s articles that I've read say. They advise people to stay outside the city, that's one of the advantages of a motel.

**Lally:** Yeah, no there are old motels on Route 1.

**Evans:** Yeah.

**Lally:** Ancient motels on Route 1 and ancient motels on 29-211, but those were the only two ways you could come in. In those days.

**Evans:** Those two roads?

**Lally:** Yeah.

**Evans:** 1 and 29-211

**Lally:** Because you didn't have Shirley Highway.

**Evans:** No.

**Lally:** Shirley Highway stopped at Route 7 in 1945. There was no Shirley Highway. So the only way that— and there was no Springfield. There wasn't such a thing as Springfield. Springfield on the old map was just a spring field and there was nothing there.

**Evans:** There was a station, a railroad station.

**Lally:** Yeah, but nothing there because when you're talking about—

**Evans:** No.

**Lally:** I'm talking about there was a little station there. I mean we're talking about— I mean Clifton would've made Springfield, Clifton in those days would've made Springfield look like a little jerk dirt poor town, I mean Clifton was you know there were houses there, but Springfield I mean nothing. Like Burke Station, Burke was nothing. There was nothing else there.

**Evans:** Nothing there. Let me ask you because you come from Alexandria, now then the 1930s AAA Guide lists the Penn Daw, they didn't call it a motel, they called it a hotel that was a collection of bungalows. A hotel that is a bungalow. Do you remember that?

**Lally:** Yeah.

**Evans:** That's a modern motel in that from those times.

**Lally:** Yeah, but those— they had more than one set of old motels down along the highway, more than one. I would say they had just about as many motels along Route 1 as they did along 29-211. Because I remember when I ran for office back in 1963, I use to go down there. I remember there was one guy who was on the Democratic Committee who was a motel owner and he had an old motel that was about like mine. Then further up in the Penn Daw area, well particularly down near The Nightingale there's some old motels. Remember The Nightingale? Well The Nightingale was one of the first places in Fairfax County you could come in and package liquor in a big sort of setups. That was a big bar. They had a band in there and you could dance and everything there in those days. But there were several motels.

**[end of transcription]**

**Transcribed by Chris Barbuschak, May 2020**